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# THE SOFT BALANCING OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: BETWEEN THE EU'S NORMATIVE POWER AND EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION'S EXPANSION IN THE EASTERN EUROPE

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**Abstract:** *Having the 2014-2017 timeframe, we aim to observe the long distance duel between the EU and the EEU, the interests of the two organizations being the most visible in the Republic of Moldova, a state with a soft balancing attitude which is at the same time an observer-member of the Eurasian Economic Union, and also a signatory-member of the Association Agreement with the EU. In order of capturing as faithfully as possible this remote match, we want to analyze the European normative power in relation to the Republic of Moldova by analyzing the main changes that Moldova's trade relations with Brussels and Moscow have suffered following the signing of the Association Agreement in 2014 and the institutional crystallization of the EEU in 2015, using data provided by the Moldavian National Bureau of Statistics and analyzing the official documents which laid the foundations for the recent relationship between the Republic of Moldova and the two organizations.*

**Keywords:** *Normative Power; European Union; Eurasian Economic Union; Republic of Moldova; Soft Balancing*

## INTRODUCTION

The flexibility of the international environment produces many transformations on how powerful actors understand to pursue their interests, recently being developed a trend which brings into question a new type of influence, the so-called 'normative power', a hybrid that combines the power of example with coercive elements. At this moment, the European Union is the principal user of this model; seeking to share its prosperity with all those which are willing to, along with all the financial advantages, also adopt the fundamental principles of the Union. If the situation in North Africa is relatively clear, the data of the problem changes in the east of the European continent, as the normative power has to face the new instrument of the expanding influence of the Russian Federation, The Eurasian Economic Union, a new body that is trying to take over the values of Brussels, maintains an 'open-doors' approach for the perpetuation of autocracy in the Member States.

In such a context, Republic of Moldova (RM) is trapped in the middle, gravitating between East and West, becoming extremely difficult to discern who has the foreground regarding the state located on the right bank of the Prut. Therefore, we discover from a source that more than 49% of Moldavian citizens would be willing to accept the integration of Republic of Moldova into the European Union<sup>1</sup>, whilst the Russian press proposes a 42% share when it comes to Moldavians' will to become members of the EEU<sup>2</sup>.

In such a context, through the present paper we intend to carry out a qualitative research on the European normative power (ENP) in the Republic of Moldova, analyzing the effects that normative power produces on the Moldavian trade, within the context of strengthening the Eurasian Economic Union. Two main objectives are assigned to our approach, namely: the evaluation of the main changes that the ENP has made on the trade of the Republic of Moldova, as well as statistical analysis of the impact on trade with the signing of the Association Agreement between the EU and the Republic of Moldova.

At the beginning of this scientific endeavor, one substantial question arises: How did the economic instruments of the European Normative Power influence the foreign trade of the Republic of Moldova in relation to the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union during the period between 2014 and 2017? This paper states that the signing of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement in 2014, as an economic instrument of the European Normative Power, has visibly influenced the foreign trade of the Republic of Moldova with the European Union, to the detriment of the one with the EEU.

In the first section, there will be presented the main trajectories of the debates on the concept of normative power, then the focus shall be shifted to the Eurasian Economic Union,

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<sup>1</sup> Cristi Vlad. 2017. IRI Poll: 49% of Moldovans support joining EU, Igor Dodon's approval rating at 48%. Accessed on June 8, 2019. <https://www.moldova.org/en/iri-poll-49-moldovans-support-joining-eu-igor-dodons-approval-rating-48/>.

<sup>2</sup> Poll reveals most Moldavians support integration into Eurasian Economic Union. Accessed on June 7, 2019. <http://tass.com/world/986684>.

as well as to the Republic of Moldova, seen as an actor at the confluence of two poles of influence. Our case study on the implications of the normative power on Moldavian foreign trade will be structured in two parts. Thus, in a first phase, a content analysis of the reference documents will be undertaken, and later, based on statistical data, there will be presented the effects created by the Association Agreement on the commercial relations Brussels-Chisinau / Chisinau-EEU, and in the last section the results and conclusions of the research will be highlighted.

## WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

### *The Normative Power*

A major debate on the European normative power comes from the paper published in 2002 by Ian Manners, who, amid discussions about the role that the European Union should assume, be it civil or military power, he also proposes the concept of normative power (Manners 2002, 235-58). Four years later, Janne Matlary appeals to the need for the European Union to assume the role of a strategic actor through an European strategic culture, which would incorporate within it the notion of European soft power as well as the term of human security (Matlary 2006, 105-21). A significant contribution to our discussion is brought by Christopher Hill, who analyzes the possibility of a European soft power strategy, taking into consideration in his approach the European Security and Defense Policy, as well as the notion of European intervention (Hill 2010, 182-99). Kristian Nielsen comes with an approach to European soft power, framed by the discussion about the gap between expectations and capabilities with which is facing the European Union (Nielsen 2013, 724-33).

As an extension of the contributions to the concept of European normative power comes the approach that supports the development of a European conflict management and implicitly the EU assuming a dominant status in the region, all this meaning some intervention and involvement of Brussels in the neighboring countries. Richard Whitman contributes to this vision by extending the concept of normative power, by associating it with concepts such as international identity, sustainable peace or crisis management, while at the same time proposing to delimit the term of normative power from other similar notions (Whitman 2011, 1-25). Continuing with the evolution of the debate, Hiski Haukkala treats the European Union as a regional normative hegemon, reinforcing his opinion by discussing the European Neighborhood Policy and the relationship between European enlargement and the concept of normative power (Haukkala 2011, 45-65). Diez and Pace bring their contribution through the perspective they have on the normative power in relation to the transformations of the conflict that can also intervene, also introducing into the equation the power of reputation (Diez and Pace 2011, 210-26). To this is added the contribution of Nicu Popescu, who proposes to introduce the concepts of metering and stealth intervention, when it comes to European conflict management (Popescu 2011, 38-65).

A significant contribution to this debate is the paper “Resistant to Change” by Mickalski and Nilsson, the authors wishing to analyze the role of the European Union as an actor undertaking a normative foreign policy in the context of problematic relations with China and Russia, considering that these tensions on the Brussels-Moscow-Beijing axis can be explained by means of modern theoretical approaches, starting from the assumption that the Union's attachment to its role as an international actor with normative valences, reduces the degree of its conception that Russia and China refuse to accept the role of the EU as the main promoter of rules and principles (Michalski and Nilsson 2018, 1-5).

The two argue that sometimes conceptions of oneself can limit an actor's ability to adjust their position in the system, with the norms of Brussels being abruptly counteracted in Eastern Europe by the actions of the Russian Federation (Michalski and Nilsson 2018, 16). Instead, Bettina Ahrens states that the European normative power means that the Union has a transformational impact on international society, however, raising the question whether such an impact can be sustained given events such as the Brexit or the refugee crisis (Ahrens 2018, 199). Ahrens introduces the concept of ambiguity, used as an instrument of normative power, thus building her plea around the argument that the EU's transformational agenda is not really affected by ambiguity, but rather potentiated by it (Ahrens 2018, 199-200).

On the one hand, a new perspective on the subject is brought by the work of Wagnsson and Hellman, which, starting from the premise that the normative power of the Union should meet clear discursive standards, and ending with the two wondering to what extent Brussels can do so in a time when Russia's subversive actions should be defended. In addition, it is considered that, through the development of the East Stratcom Taskforce, the Union suffered a significant loss of reflectivity and normative power, the authors believing that, despite those asserted by Manners and Diez with their “utopian standards”, it is nevertheless possible to discuss certain guiding principles that can improve the normative power so as it can become a notion capable of avoiding unnecessary damage (Wagnsson and Hellman 2018, 1161). Moreover, in the same paper, the European normative receives new valences, asserting that only through such a concept traditional military capabilities can be trained, therefore, future theoretical approaches should focus on ways in which hard power elements can be used, without harming the normative power (Wagnsson and Hellman 2018, 1171). On the other hand, Celata and Coletti seek to propose a critical analysis on the abundance of geographical issues concerning the European Neighborhood Policy, since both the partisans and their opponents offer a much too restrictive perspective on the internal/external type of distinctions, therefore, the authors put on the ground the theoretical innovations of recent date, proposing a broader view on the relations that the EU has with the neighboring states, using concepts such as Europeanization, external governance or policy diffusion, starting from the assumption that regionalization and neighborhood (‘bordering processes’) are neither contradictory nor divergent, but operate simultaneously in an attempt to build an external border of EU, which is meant to be selective, fragmented and

mobile (Celata and Coletti 2016, 15). Ian Manners reinvigorates the debate with his paper on the sociology of knowledge regarding the production of normative power, focusing on the “thematic inseparability between the EU's attempts to build its own mechanism of external action in global politics and the research on the status of EU as a global actor” (Manners 2015, 300), the theoretician's argument being that, both the external actions of Brussels, as well as the aspects that are close to their analyzes, suffer from a non-abusive dichotomization (Manners 2015, 300). Manners notes that the 15 years of propagating the idea of normative power show that both ‘strategic dichotomization’ and ‘social diffusion’ are extremely important in understanding the false dichotomies of the sociology of knowledge and of Brussels' interactions with the outside (Manners 2015, 315).

As an extension of the discussion about the ways in which the Union propagates its normative power in the vicinity, Gordon and Pardo seek to analyze the events surrounding the publication of the Brussels guidelines which prohibit any allocation of funds to Israeli entities in the occupied territories, the main purpose being that of seeing how action on a local level impacts the normative power of the EU (Gordon and Pardo 2015, 416). The paper starts from 3 premises:

firstly, the influence of the ‘power of the local Europe’ in relation to the decisions of the use of the normative power has increased, secondly, it is assumed that the relations of the local power in the ‘target’ states usually determines the use of the normative power, and the last hypothesis stating that the visibility of European normative power (ENP) has an impact on the identity of the Union (Gordon and Pardo 2015 , 416-17).

In addition, Martin-Maze, through his work “Unpacking Interests in Normative Power Europe”, states that the notion of normative power has overturned the formation of clear distinctions in relation to the practices that the European Union uses at international level, all, according to the author, because of the constructivism that perpetuated the dualism between norms and interests (Martin-Mazé 2015, 1-4). In Maze's vision, interests are a composition made up of aspects that connect two actors in particular circumstances and what determines them to participate in such a context, the researcher seeking to explore the integrated management of EU borders in the Central Asia area (Martin-Mazé 2015, 1-4).

### *Eurasian Economic Union*

In the beginning of this debate we will focus on the work of Vinokurov, through his historical approach trying to explain the way and the context in which we came to discuss today about a Eurasian Economic Union. Therefore, the organization has its origins in the early 1990s, when, after the collapse of the USSR, the former Soviet republics, with the exception of the Baltic States, lay the foundation of the Commonwealth of Independent

States (CIS), an entity without federalist claims, through which an amortization after the shock of the collapse of the communist colossus was sought. However, due to the deficient statutory acts, with time, the CIS has proved to be extremely inefficient (Vinokurov 2018, 1-2). An essential moment for the Eurasian integration happened in 2009, when, in the background of the economic crisis, the states of the region sign the necessary documents in order to create the EurAsEc Anti-Crisis Fund (ACF), following the signing in 2012 of the Single Economic Space Agreement (SES), subsequently, in the desire of further integration, in May 2014, at a meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, the SES member states and the Eurasian Customs Union initial the Eurasian Economic Union Treaty, through this document having been laid the foundations of a common market for medical products, having in mind an extension of the initiative to the financial, oil and energy sector (Vinokurov 2018, 2-8).

Maksim Karliuk treats the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) from a legal perspective, analyzing the institutional architecture of this organization, the similarities and differences in relation to the European Union, the main objective being to find out if the changes that led to the creation of this new entity allow the good - operation of the EEU, as well as the extent to which the legal-institutional order is as autonomous as the one within the EU, Karliuk's argument being that, from an organizational point of view, the entity promoted by Putin has certain delays compared to Brussels, in fact, the former having limited supranational characteristics, focusing mainly on intergovernmental approaches (Karliuk 2015, 2-4). In contrast, the work of Khitakhunov, Mukhamediyev and Pomfret, focuses on analyzing the political and economic situation of the Eurasian Union, trying to find a satisfactory answer to the question related to the reasons behind the creation of this entity after the failure of the CIS. The three authors set out to examine the effects and opportunities on the regional economy, in the context of Russia's sanctions and Moscow's counter-sanctions (Khitakhunov, Mukhamediyev and Pomfret 2017, 2-5), stating that despite the admission of Russia and Kazakhstan to the World Trade Organization, the EEU cannot be considered still a threat to major trade agreements, due to the instability generated by the sanctions war, as well as the economic threat posed by China (Khitakhunov, Mukhamediyev and Pomfret 2017, 17-18).

The debate on the Eurasian Economic Union is continued by Kaczmarski, who is trying to undertake an analysis of the confrontation between Russia and China, comparing the EEU with China's One Belt, One Road initiative, as these projects involve distinct sets of practices in their attempt to gain as much influence as possible, starting from the hypothesis that a Beijing-Moscow competition in Central Asia is a little feasible, considering that the Russian Federation is interested in creating a sphere of influence in the area of the former Soviet republics, in the idea of supporting the status of dominant actor in the region, while the Chinese want to increase their economic presence in a geographical area as large as possible, hiding behind the concept of multilateralism (Kaczmarski 2017, 1027).



Unlike Kaczmarek, Sean Roberts intends to understand how cooperation between authoritarian regimes works, considering that autocratic leaders are trying to counter democratic outbursts by creating regional organizations that serve as a tool for expanding their power (Roberts 2017, 1-2). Therefore, starting from the argument that Eurasian political regimes provide an extremely powerful explanation for the inability of EEU members to coordinate common policies, Roberts proposes a theoretical framework around the concept of 'autocratic survival', applying it to the case of the Eurasian Economic Union (Roberts 2017, 2-5). As an extension of the two precursors, Verdiyeva comes with a slightly different perspective, in that it analyzes the current status of the EEU and how this organization wants to be a second largest entity of its kind after the European Union, having strong integrationist aspirations, supported by an institutional framework similar to the Brussels one, the main hypothesis of this scientific enterprise arguing that there are a number of challenges to the effective functioning of the EEU, thus, Member States are not fully engaged in the process of economic liberalization, contrary to what they want to promote in the public space (Verdiyeva 2018, 722-24).

### *Ambivalent Position of the Republic of Moldova*

An interesting perspective on the subject is provided by Cantir and Kennedy, who embrace the concept of 'soft balancing' in the context of its emergence, as a way of reconciling classical realism with the lack of strong balancing behavior against American hegemony, the authors taking as a reference object the sudden change of attitude of the foreign policy undertaken by the Republic of Moldova in the 2000s (Cantir and Kennedy 2015, 397). The two state that Moldova's attitude is a clear example of soft balancing, this case bringing a number of valuable clues to the soft balancing concept, the main hypothesis being that, while Post-Soviet Republic of Moldova faced the Russian threat and the inability to balance, the Moldavian state gradually switched to using a light balancing strategy only when the European Union created an appropriate framework for such an attitude (Cantir and Kennedy 2015, 397-398). Instead, Niznikau Ryhor seeks to examine the policies of the European Union and Russia in the Republic of Moldova, as well as how they contribute to the dysfunctionality of institutions and political instability, elements that have permanently hampered the country's development path (Niznikau 2016, 203). The hypothesis from which Niznikau starts is similar to Delcour's (Delcour 2018, 1-5), both considering that the policies implemented by Brussels and Moscow in the Republic of Moldova are similar, both seeking to create a support base for their future actions in the state beyond Prut river, wishing to attract the local elites, in order to be able to get involved in the internal politics, the main beneficiaries of the EU-Russia confrontation being those who occupy high positions in Chisinau, using the external support to maintain their own privileges (Niznikau 2016, 203-204).



## THEORY

It is extremely important to define the exact concept under which the primary documents are to be analyzed, thus, after completing the specialized literature, the following conceptual essence emerges, the normative power being defined by Ian Manners as an attempt to direct the analysis towards the inclusion of cognitive processes, both through their symbolic component but also through the substance component, the author asserting that the normative foundations of the EU involve 5 key norms (the community and political *acquis*, the centralization of peace, the idea of freedom, democracy, human rights), there being 6 factors of power diffusion (contagion, informational diffusion, procedural diffusion, open diffusion, transferability, cultural filter) (Manners 2002, 239-45). An important contribution comes from Christopher Hill, in whose opinion normative power is the ability to shape the norms of international politics through personal example (Hill 2010, 183-84). Diez and Pace come to reinforce the meaning of the term normative power, thus, they say that, for example, the normative power of the European Union resides in the identity that Brussels provides, as well as in the changes that it imposes on others, doing this partially thanks to the hegemonic status that it enjoys in the proximity, also, the reputation being a determining factor in the exercise approach of the normative power (Diez and Pace, 210-214).

## METHODOLOGY

In this section we will present the methodology used to carry out this paper, our approach having a qualitative approach, based on the primary documents relevant to our research problem, as well as on the data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics from Moldova. Therefore, having as a period of interest the years 2014-2017, in the first stage we carried out the identification and selection of the official reference documents for the questions raised in relation to the EU-Moldova-EEU trident, the content analysis based on the concept of normative power serving as the main instrument. In the second part, the proposed hypothesis will be tested using the data published by NBS Moldova, so we will analyze comparatively the time progress of Chisinau's external trade with the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union.

## FOREIGN TRADE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN NORMATIVE POWER AND EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION

### *European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)*

An initiative that has its roots in the Treaty of the European Union, the ENP is a classic exponent of European normative power (ENP) in the sense that it aims to strengthen the prosperity, stability and security of the states close to the borders of the European Union.

In addition, the Neighborhood Policy is a mechanism through which democracy and the rule of law will be promoted in the surrounding countries, giving rise to bilateral and regional cooperation initiatives, such as the Eastern Partnership and the Mediterranean Union. The policy has a clear normative character, having as main objectives the deepening of the European cooperation and integration mechanisms, but all this only in the conditions in which they start from "common principles and values" (European Neighborhood Policy).

The relevance for the case of the Republic of Moldova with the European Neighborhood Policy is tangential, but nonetheless fundamental, since the Moldova-EU Association Agreement could be seeded later on the basis of the ENP.

### *Eastern Partnership (EP)*

Through the Joint Declaration of the Prague Summit (2009) the Eastern Partnership is officially launched, being based "on common interests and commitments", the normative power making its presence felt even from the preamble, invoking the concept of "full transparency". The Partnership signatories are committed to adopting a peaceful attitude, by virtue of international law, because only in such a context can development in financial or social sectors be deepened (Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit 2009, 5-6). Brussels is pursuing the exercise of a *à la carte* normative power, thus, through assistance programs and trainings included in the Comprehensive Institution Building Programs, the Union wants to improve the administrative and governance skills of the Eastern partners (Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit 2009, 7).

Such an initiative gives additional exposure to EU activities for non-member states, as they have the opportunity to participate in numerous inter-institutional projects and meetings, moreover, countries such as Moldova will have the opportunity to access various funding lines from Brussels, through which they can improve their economic indices.

### ***Association Agreement between European Union and Republic of Moldova***

The incipient of cooperation between Brussels and Chisinau is easily identifiable in the European Neighborhood Policy, and, more specifically, in the Eastern Partnership, but the exercise of the European normative power in Moldova reaches the peak in 2014, once the Association Agreement is signed, the act, a very comprehensive one., mainly regulates the economic interactions between the two partners, but, as in a classic game of normative power, the preamble also establishes the conditions under which the bilateral relations will unfold. Another evidence of the ENP lies in the clear statement that Republic of Moldova, by its own will, undertakes to respect the fundamental European principles (Association Agreement between European Union and Republic of Moldova 2014, 3-4). As stated in Article 1, the Agreement has as main objectives the undertaking of activities through which to consolidate security, peace, justice and democracy, as well as the creation of favorable conditions for the development of economic and commercial relations (Article 1-g). Also, it is desired "a gradual integration of the Republic of Moldova within the internal market, even by establishing a free trade area, which will implicitly include legislative approaches" (Association Agreement between European Union and Republic of Moldova 2014, 6-8).

### ***The Memorandum for Financial Support***

The economic relations between the EU and Moldova, viewed through the conceptual magnifier of the normative power, see a new dimension through the Memorandum for financial support, through which a loan line for Chisinau of approximately € 100 million is approved. The main objective of this loan is to rebalance the balance of payments and finances of the Republic of Moldova, which suffered a severe shock in 2015, by disappearing about \$ 1 billion from the national banking system.<sup>3</sup> According to the agreement, the amount of money attributed to Chisinau will be transferred in 3 installments, in the good spirit of the European normative power, these being conditioned by a series of Brussels-inspired reforms on the administrative and financial systems (Memorandum of understanding between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union 2017, 1-4).

### ***Implementation of the Association Agreement***

Previously, only documents presenting the EU-Chisinau relationship were presented from the perspective of the European normative power, but in order to have a complex picture of the situation it is also necessary the perspective of the Republic of Moldova,

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<sup>3</sup>Andrew Higgins. 2015. "Moldova, Hunting for Missing Millions, Finds only Ash". *The New York Times*, June 4, 2015. Accessed on June 7, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/05/world/europe/moldova-bank-theft.html>.

therefore, analyzing the degree of implementation of the provisions of the Agreement constitutes a more than beneficial approach. Completion of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Association Agreement, undertakes a "quantitative assessment" of the level of achievement of those provided in the bilateral document signed in 2014, thus, the Chisinau authorities consider that about 60% of the proposed objectives have been achieved. It is noted that, in the field of trade, the Republic of Moldova has fulfilled about 80% of the quotas it undertook to export to the European market, there being products such as processed wheat and cereals that knew values above the target level. The normative influence of the EU on trade matters is clearly identifiable through the steps taken to align with the European requirements of the accreditation system of the exporting companies from the Republic of Moldova; in this respect a new legislative framework has been adopted. Also, the processes of harmonization and regarding the national systems of metrology, standardization and epidemiological warning continued, and in the same context new measures are being implemented in order to meet the product discrepancy standards (Realizarea Planului National de Actiuni pentru Implementarea Acordului de Asociere 2017, 24-25).

### *Treaty of the Eurasian Economic Union*

The content analysis cannot be complete without introducing the actor on the basis of which we try to capture the effects of the European normative power, so it is necessary to pass in front the most relevant provision in relation to Moldova of the Treaty of the Eurasian Economic Union. The act in question, based on the Declaration of Eurasian Economic Integration., states that the new organization will be guided by the principle of equal sovereignty between states, seeking to "strengthen solidarity and cooperation", ensuring "economic progress through joint actions" in order to achieve sustainable development through "increasing the competitiveness of national economies in a global framework" (Treaty of the Eurasian Economic Union 2014, 1).

The Treaty becomes extremely relevant in the context of our analysis because, by exposing principles such as competitiveness and development, it is clear that an extension of the entity is aimed at new geographical areas, a first signal being the granting of the observer status to the Republic of Moldova (Eurasian Economic Commission – Moldova granted Observer State Status 2017), therefore, it becomes extremely interesting to analyze the commercial relations on the Brussels-Chisinau / Chisinau-Moscow axis, given that, at least on a declarative level, both international organizations share a number of liberal principles.

### *Statistical Approaches upon Moldova's External Trade*

Within this section, the data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova will be analyzed, through which we intend to observe the impact of the Moldova-EU Association Agreement on the foreign trade of Chisinau during the period 2014-2017, taking as a comparison element the Member States of the Eurasian Economic Union. If we were to analyze the transformations that Moldova's exports to the EU have undergone since 2014, we find a gradual improvement, thus, the year of signing the Agreement brings an increase of approximately \$ 110 million compared to 2013, while 2017 is experiencing an increase of approximately 30% compared to the period before the Association Agreement. By contrast, exports to EEU countries have dropped sharply as a result of their partnership with Brussels. Concretely, if in 2013 we were talking about an export value of about \$ 760 million, in 2014 they reach around \$ 610 million, in 2017 reaching a minimum of \$ 360 million, using simplistic terms, while the value of the products sent to the European space increased by about 30%; comparing with the Eurasian Union, there was a loss of about 50% (Republic of Moldova's National Bureau of Statistics – foreign trade 2014-2017).

In terms of imports, the value of the products brought from the European space is kept at around 2.4 billion \$, although there is a serious fluctuation between 2015 and 2016, when it reaches the amount of 1.9 billion \$. On the other side, in the case of the Eurasian Economic Union, we are discussing a situation such as that of the case of exports, so that if in 2013 the imports had an amount of approximately \$ 1 billion, in 2017 the total amount does not exceed \$ 688 million, with a reorientation of Rep. Moldova to goods from the European Union (Republic of Moldova's National Bureau of Statistics – foreign trade 2014-2017).

### CONCLUSION

Theoretically, the European normative power has been widely debated in the literature, the main theoretical contributions being made by Manners, Diez and Hill and being implemented by the Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and its regional extensions. This concept works visibly in the proximity of the European Union, Brussels seeking to conclude economic partnerships and not only with those who, either by conviction or by interest is willing to share European values and principles unconditionally.

We found that the EU-Moldova Association Agreement meets the characteristics of a true normative power instrument, firstly because it derives directly from the ENP, and secondly, due to the ability to influence the values of the Republic of Moldova. Therefore, as mentioned above, this document manages to instill in the Eastern Partnership the EU principles on trade, with the legislative harmonization undertaken by Chisinau in this area being a conclusive example. This kind of legislative uniformity has the gift of producing beneficial effects on the economy.

Taking these aspects into account, we consider that the Association Agreement, as a tool of European normative power, visibly influenced the trade of the Republic of Moldova with the EU in the period 2014-2017, to the detriment of the one with the Eurasian Economic Union, as, by the statistical data presented we showed what impact the Agreement had on imports and exports of the Republic of Moldova. Thus, although in 2013 the situation was somewhat balanced, with an increase in favor of the European Union, since 2014 there have been considerable changes, the imports and exports to the European area increasing, while the commercial relations with the Eurasian Union have been in a continuous decline, in 2017 there being a decrease of about 50% compared to 2013/2014, despite the fact that Moldova had meanwhile become an observer within the EEU. However, it should be mentioned that, in the period 2015-2016, there were registered some decreases of the Moldavian external trade, and we put this fact on the account of Russian Federation sanctions impose to Chisinau and also due to the financial crisis that this country went through as a result of the disappearance of one billion Euros from the national banking system. 

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